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Topic
Professional & Personal Development

Building Love That Lasts

Guidebook

Suzann Pileggi Pawelski
James O. Pawelski



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Suzann Pileggi Pawelski

Suzann Pileggi Pawelski is a well-being writer, consultant, and positive psychology expert specializing in the science of happiness and its effects on relationships and health. She earned her master of applied positive psychology degree from the University of Pennsylvania.

Suzie's 2010 *Scientific American MIND* cover story "The Happy Couple" was the catalyst for *Happy Together: Using the Science of Positive Psychology to Build Love That Lasts*, the best-selling book that she wrote with her husband, James. Named one of the best books of 2018 by Business Insider, *SUCCESS* magazine, and the Greater Good Science Center, *Happy Together* has also been featured in *TIME* magazine, *Inc.* magazine, *Parade* magazine, *People* magazine, *New York* magazine, NPR, *The Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, among others. On his show *Larry King Now*, Larry King, who was married eight times, said he wished he "would've had this book 20 years ago."

As a contributing editor for *Live Happy* and columnist for the newsletter of the International Positive Psychology Association, Suzie profiled many of the field's leading scientists and featured their groundbreaking research. She also pens a popular relationship blog for *Psychology Today* and gives Romance and Research™ workshops around the world with James. ■



James O. Pawelski

James O. Pawelski is Professor of Practice and Director of Education in the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania, where he cofounded the world's first master of applied positive psychology program with Martin Seligman. An award-winning teacher, he earned his PhD in Philosophy from The Pennsylvania State University.

James is a collaborative leader, having served as the founding executive director of the International Positive Psychology Association and as president of the William James Society. He is the founding director of the Humanities and Human Flourishing Project, which has been designated a National Endowment for the Arts Research Lab. He is the author, coauthor, or coeditor of several books—including *The Oxford Handbook of the Positive Humanities*—and the editor of the Humanities and Human Flourishing book series with Oxford University Press.

With his wife, Suzann Pileggi Pawelski, James coauthored *Happy Together: Using the Science of Positive Psychology to Build Love That Lasts*, and together they present Romance and Research™ workshops around the world.

An international keynote speaker, James has presented in more than 20 countries. He is frequently featured in the media, including *The New York Times*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *TODAY*. ■

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BUILDING

LOVE

THAT LASTS

Loving relationships don't just feel good, they are good for us. Scientific research demonstrates that they are foundational to our well-being. They are associated with a healthier and more flourishing life. In fact, eminent Harvard psychiatrist George Vaillant, who for decades was at the helm of the largest study ever conducted on adult development, the Harvard Grant Study, found that loving relationships were the single greatest predictor of aging well.

What does it take to have a great, loving relationship and reap all the inherent well-being effects?

Interestingly, there is a lot of focus in our culture on getting together but not much on staying together or growing together.

Falling in love is an exhilarating experience, and it makes for great fairy tales and films. Falling in love is easy. But so, too, is *failing* in love, as statistics bear out. Nearly half of all marriages end in divorce. Storybook romances can be entertaining and even riveting, but they tell you almost nothing about what you need to not just fall in love but also stand in love, to not just get swept away by someone in a magical moment but also flourish with someone over the long term.

When it comes to lasting love, many people may have been led to believe it's just supposed to happen automatically and effortlessly, that one day you will meet your perfect mate, fall in love, and live happily ever after. Or perhaps it's not the fairy-tale view of romance that beleaguers you. Rather, you may think you need to improve your relationship by fixating on problems, or even worse, fixing your spouse, nitpicking everything you find wrong in your relationship and with your significant other. Or you may acknowledge you have to work on building your bond but don't know where to start.

There are obviously problems with these various ways of thinking and behaving in a relationship. First of all, relationships require effort to develop specific skills and habits. And that effort needs to be consistent and balanced. Couples need to regularly focus their attention on what's already going right in the relationship (and their partner) rather than merely dwelling on what's wrong. Finally, the science of positive psychology can help direct your efforts by providing specific evidence-based ways to adopt healthy habits to make lasting change in your loving relationships.

In this fun and interactive course, positive psychology experts and husband-and-wife team Suzann Pileggi Pawelski and James Pawelski present empirical research, real-life examples, and advice from relationship scientists on building a lasting love.

Suzie and James emphasize the importance of focusing on what you put into the relationship rather than what you get out of it. Based on the ancient wisdom of Aristotelian philosophy and the modern-day science of positive psychology, you will learn how to find and feed the good in one another and your relationship rather than focus on problems.

You will learn how to practice the following evidence-based healthy habits, among others:

- ♥ **Promoting a healthy passion** by maintaining your own identity rather than losing yourself in your partner and being swept away by an all-consuming obsessive passion, which is often how popular culture portrays romantic love.
- ♥ **Cultivating positive emotions** rather than just waiting and expecting them to happen. You will learn one of the most important habits of people who are genuinely happy and how to cultivate feelings of joy, hope, and gratitude throughout your relationship, not just in the honeymoon stage.

- ♥ **Mindfully savoring** your partner and your experiences together. Feeling valued and appreciated by one's partner is associated with a more satisfying and sustainable relationship. You will learn how to actively acknowledge your partner and express that appreciation to them to help strengthen your bond.
- ♥ **Seeking out strengths.** Spotting strengths in yourself and your partner is tied to greater individual and relational well-being. You and your partner will discover your top strengths and practice applying them in your daily lives together to build a deeper and more loving connection.

Throughout the course you will be invited to practice new skills and exercises at the “Relationship Gym,™” a term Suzie and James coined to emphasize the importance of ongoing practice. If you want to improve your physical fitness, you don't expect that simply buying a gym membership or going only once will automatically result in a fitter and more flexible physique. Rather, it takes consistent effort. You need to engage in ongoing and novel exercises to tone and strengthen your muscles. So, too, if you want to have a better, healthier relationship, you need to practice flexing your relational muscles to build resistance and strength. Incorporating a variety of exercises and introducing novelty are key so as not to plateau. Just as you need to switch things up in your physical workouts to keep them effective, you need to do the same in your relationships to keep them fresh and dynamic.

By the end of this course, you will have a toolkit of exercises you can regularly go to for building a love that lasts.

Lesson 1

**An Introduction
to Making
Love Last**

Believing popular myths about romance can lead to unrealistic expectations about love and what a healthy relationship looks like. The reality is that no relationship is perfect, and each one takes effort. Creating lasting love requires attention and discipline, much like developing a successful career or building a healthy body. And your chances for success are even greater when you have the expert guidance of a mentor or coach to support you along the way.

Relationship Gym

Reflect on what “happy together” means to you. How would you define a healthy romantic relationship? Take some time to write down your ideas, noting whether you have been influenced by your own experience or by things you’ve read, movies you’ve watched, or songs you’ve listened to. Or maybe you’ve been influenced by what you learned (or didn’t learn) from your parents’ relationship. Once you have considered and written down your ideas, discuss them with your partner or someone else you trust.



Further Reading

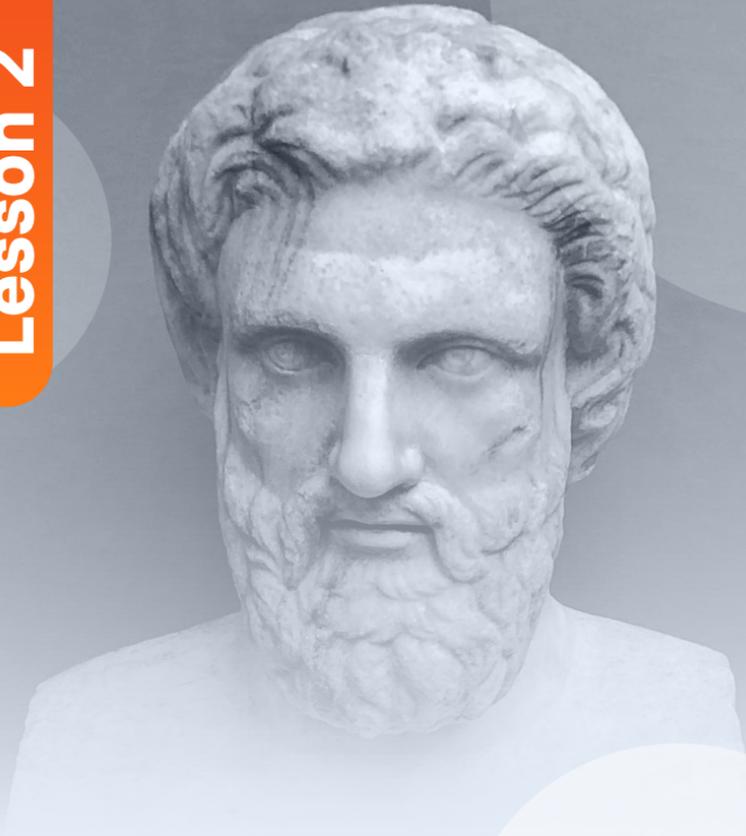
Pileggi Pawelski and Pawelski, *Happy Together*.

Seligman, *Authentic Happiness*.

Vaillant, *Aging Well*.

———, *Triumphs of Experience*.

Lesson 2



**Love Lessons
from Ancient
Greece**

In his famous work the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle described three types of friendships: those based on usefulness, those based on pleasure, and those based on goodness. While each type has value, Aristotle suggested the third kind creates the deepest, longest-lasting connection between people. Suzie and James apply these ideas to romantic relationships, coining the term “Aristotelian Love” to describe a relationship grounded in virtue, where you not only see the good in your partner but also feel inspired to become a better person yourself.

Relationship Gym

How do the ideas of Aristotelian Love inform how you define “happy together”? Go back to the definition you created after the previous lesson and see if you want to revise it at all.

Think about the relationships in your life—past, present, or (hoped for) future. What can you learn about them when you view them through the lens of Aristotelian Love (usefulness/pleasure/goodness)?

To what degree is your relationship motivated by what you get out of it in terms of pleasure or usefulness?

How much is your relationship motivated by the good you see in your partner and the good you’d like to develop in yourself?

How might you and your partner move closer to becoming Aristotelian Lovers? What effect might this have on your relationship?



Further Reading

Algoe and Haidt, “Witnessing Excellence in Action.”

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis*.

Pawelski, *The Dynamic Individualism of William James*.

———, *The Eudaimonic Turn*.

Plato, *Symposium*.

Lesson 3



The Psychology of Lasting Love

Most people are naturally good at detecting threats and finding problems. These survival skills are a product of hundreds of thousands of years of human evolution. They are certainly still important today, but we need to balance them with an ability to see the good things around us and notice opportunities in our lives. Using research from the field of positive psychology and the metaphor of a special superhero's cape, this lesson explores how people thrive when they balance out the natural tendency to focus on problems (using the red side of the cape) with efforts to seek out opportunities and cultivate positive experiences (using the green side of the cape).

Relationship Gym

Take a moment to reflect on how you use your superhero's cape in your relationship. Do you tend to use one side more than the other? Keeping in mind that both are necessary, are there ways you can use the green side of your cape more frequently and more effectively? How might this change your relationship? As you interact with your partner, focus on trying to use the green side of your cape more. Notice any results that follow from this approach.



Further Reading

Pileggi, "The Happy Couple."

Seligman, "Building Human Strength."

———, *Flourish*.

———. *Learned Optimism*.

———. *The Hope Circuit*.

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, "Positive Psychology."



Lesson 4

**Cultivating
the Right Kind
of Passion**



Not all passion is the same, and having the wrong kind of passion can be as detrimental to a relationship as having none at all. This lesson discusses healthy and unhealthy attachment styles and the difference between obsessive and harmonious passion. By knowing your own patterns and tendencies, you can spot red flags and take action to improve the quality of passion in your relationships.

Relationship Gym

Share good secrets with your partner to help build mutual trust. Remember to listen and be open and nonjudgmental when your partner is sharing their secrets with you. Tell them something you've never shared with anyone else before: perhaps an endearing childhood memory, a vivid dream, a fantasy for an intriguing line of work you've contemplated pursuing, or your hopes for the future.

Write down and exchange five reasons why you love your partner and value your relationship.

Engage in a novel adventure together. Join your partner in activities you both enjoy. Seeking out and participating in new and exhilarating activities together boosts mutual attraction.

Focus on connecting and cooperating rather than competing.

Reconnect with something good from your past self. Think back to your life before your relationship. How did you spend your time? What were your personal activities and interests? Are you still engaging in them? If not, take them up again. Who were the friends you did them with? Are you still seeing them? If not, schedule time to get together and connect over shared activities.

Further Reading

Aron and Aron, "Love and the Expansion of the Self."

Carbonneau, Vallerand, LaVigne, and Paquet, "I'm Not the Same Person Since I Met You."

Gottman, *The Science of Trust*.

Hatfield and Rapson, "The Neuropsychology of Passionate Love."

Vallerand, *The Psychology of Passion*.

Lesson 5



The Power of Positivity

All emotions, positive and negative, have value, but research shows that positive emotions can have surprising long-term beneficial effects on your personal health and well-being as well as on your relationships. To cultivate positive emotions effectively, it's important to understand what positivity is, what it isn't, how it differs from pleasure, and how experiences can be directly or indirectly positive.

Relationship Gym

Think about the role of positive emotions in your life. In particular, think back to a time when you experienced their broadening and building effect. Share a story with your partner about a time when a positive emotion you experienced opened you up to building long-term positive resources. Maybe you will choose to tell a story about the positive emotions you felt when you first met and the relationship you have built as a result of them. Whatever you choose to share, make sure you and your partner each have a chance to tell a story, and then reflect on the way short-term positive emotions have led to long-term positive effects.

Further Reading

David, *Emotional Agility*.

Fredrickson, "The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology."

———, "What Good Are Positive Emotions?"

Fredrickson, Mancuso, Branigan, et al, "The Undoing Effect of Positive Emotions."

Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson, "Emotional Contagion."

Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener, "The Benefits of Frequent Positive Affect."

Pawelski, "Defining the 'Positive' in Positive Psychology: Part I. A Descriptive Analysis."

———, "Defining the 'Positive' in Positive Psychology: Part II. A Normative Analysis."

Lesson 6

**Putting
Positivity into
Practice**

The key to practicing positivity is to notice activities that evoke positive emotions for you and then prioritize those activities in your daily life. Because your actions can influence your emotional state, the more you practice positivity, the more likely you are to cause the feelings you want. And because emotions can be contagious, your positivity is also more likely to spread to your partner and to others around you.

Relationship Gym

Think about specific activities you do alone and with your partner to prioritize positivity. Perhaps there are specific hobbies you used to enjoy together but no longer engage in due to your busy lifestyles. Make a commitment to do one of these activities. This will increase your chances of experiencing greater positivity in your lives. Continuing these activities can be a great way to strengthen your connection over the long term.



Further Reading

Catalino, Algoe, and Fredrickson, "Prioritizing Positivity."

Fredrickson, *Love 2.0*.

———, *Positivity*.

James, "The Gospel of Relaxation."

Mauss, Tamir, Anderson, and Savino, "Can Seeking Happiness Make People Happy?"



Lesson 7



Taking Time to Savor Your Love

Just as there are healthy strategies for coping with difficult situations, there are strategies couples can use to fully experience and appreciate the good times. Taking time to savor—to let yourself become thoroughly immersed in a positive moment—is a critical component of healthy relationships. It is a way you and your partner can create a deeper connection by sharing meaningful experiences with each other.

Relationship Gym

Do you and your partner typically make time to savor? If so, what kinds of things do you do? What is most effective for you in your relationship?

Think of a positive event that happened to you in the last week. Write down what happened, along with your answers to the following questions: How did you respond to that event? Did you forget about it and move on? Did it automatically come back into your consciousness later? Did you intentionally do something to savor it (whether or not you thought of it as savoring)? Did you write about it in a journal? Did you look at a picture you had taken of it? Did you share the experience with someone else in person or on social media? Did you savor it in some other way? If you did savor it, what was the effect of your savoring on the overall amount of enjoyment that came from the experience? If you didn't savor it, how might you have done so, and how might that have changed your experience?

Create a Positive Relationship Portfolio. If possible, do this with your partner. Bring together things that help you savor your relationship. You could put

these things in a physical space or in a virtual space. You might include things like cards and letters from your past, objects of special significance, or music and movies. Together with your partner, spend at least 15 minutes each day for a week savoring the contents of your portfolio. Feel free to add more things to the portfolio along the way.

Further Reading

Bryant, "Savoring Beliefs Inventory (SBI)."

Bryant and Veroff, *Savoring*.

Bryant, Smart, and King, "Using the Past to Enhance the Present."

Fredrickson and Joiner, "Positive Emotions Trigger Upward Spirals toward Emotional Well-Being."

Lesson 8

**Developing
Effective
Relationship
Habits**



Like emotions, habits can be contagious, and partners in a relationship often develop shared habits, good and bad. This lesson examines the power of habits and the science behind successfully creating new, healthy ones that align with the life goals you and your partner share.

Relationship Gym

Begin to create a positive relationship habit. Choose something meaningful and manageable. Remember our acronym SNAP, based on the work of William James: Start strong, No exceptions, Always act, Practice using the will. Remember, too, Wendy Wood's evidence-based recommendations for creating new habits, including the importance of frequent repetition, cues occurring in stable contexts, and rewards (especially intermittent ones). Wood also indicates that implementation plans (when x happens, I will do y) and piggybacking (connecting a new behavior to an old habit) can be helpful ways of moving from cue to action. Habits take different lengths of time to form fully, but this will at least allow you to begin the process of creating a healthy habit.



Further Reading

James, *The Principles of Psychology*.

Peterson, *A Primer in Positive Psychology*.

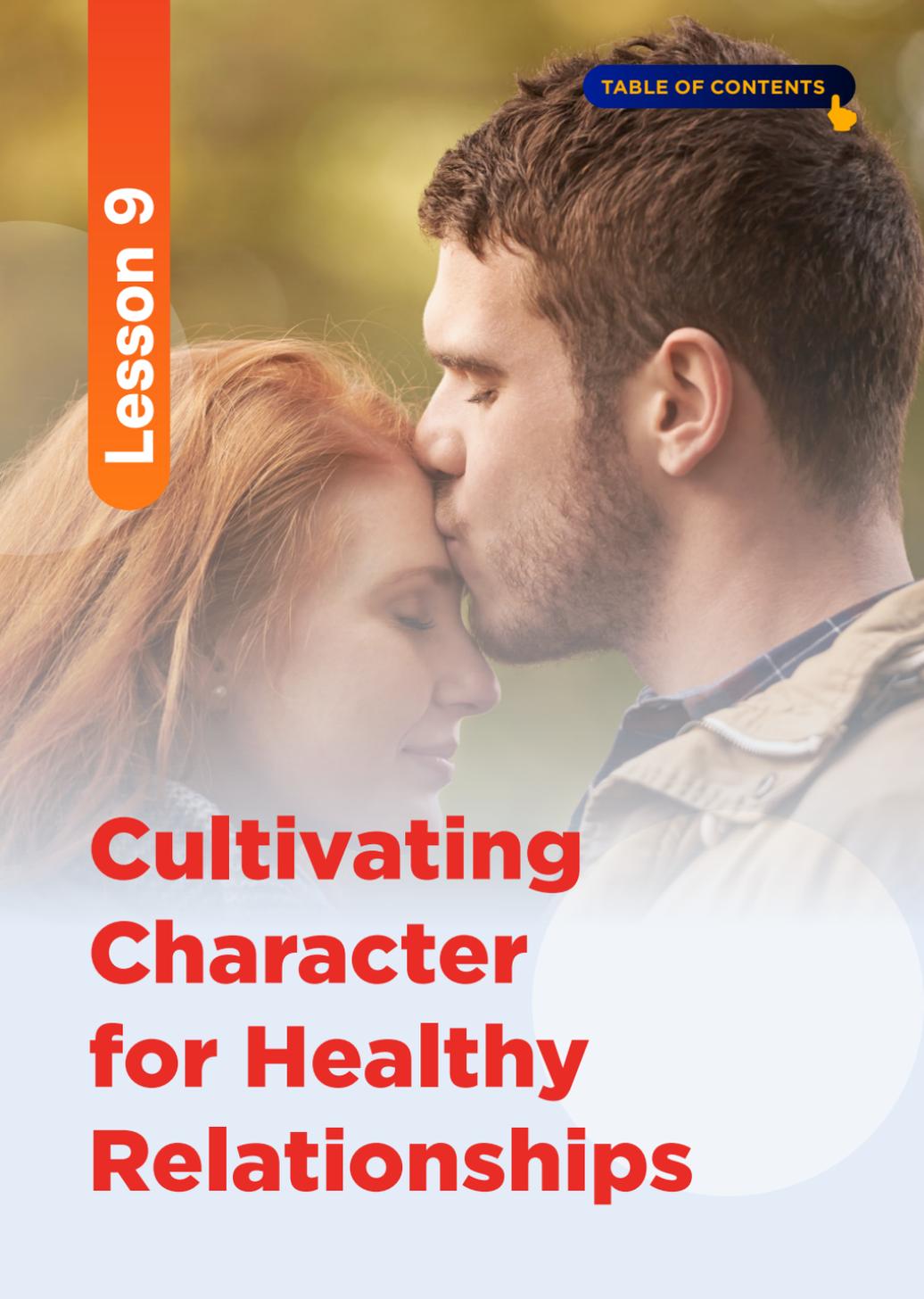
Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*.

Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson, "Positive Psychology Progress."

VIA Institute on Character, "VIA Survey of Character Strengths."

www.viacharacter.org.

Wood, *Good Habits, Bad Habits*.

A romantic couple is shown in profile, with the man kissing the woman on the cheek. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green and yellow, suggesting an outdoor setting. The overall mood is intimate and affectionate.

Lesson 9

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Cultivating Character for Healthy Relationships

Writing in the 4th century BCE, Aristotle described the connection between habit and character. Today, positive psychologists have built a science of character on the foundation of Aristotle's virtue ethics. They hold that each of us has a unique set of natural strengths and that an important aspect of building good character is developing healthy habits that use those strengths.

In relationships, partners thrive when they help each other build character and use strengths in new ways.

Relationship Gym

Take the VIA Character Strengths Survey at <https://www.viacharacter.org/>.

Watch *The Science of Character*, Tiffany Shlain's powerful eight-minute video on strengths, at <https://www.viacharacter.org/resources/videos/the-science-of-character>.

Use your signature strengths in new ways. For example, go on a strengths date, an activity that allows both you and your partner to use one of your signature strengths.



Further Reading

Kashdan, Blalock, Young, Machell, Monfort, McKnight, and Ferssizidis, "Personality Strengths in Romantic Relationships."

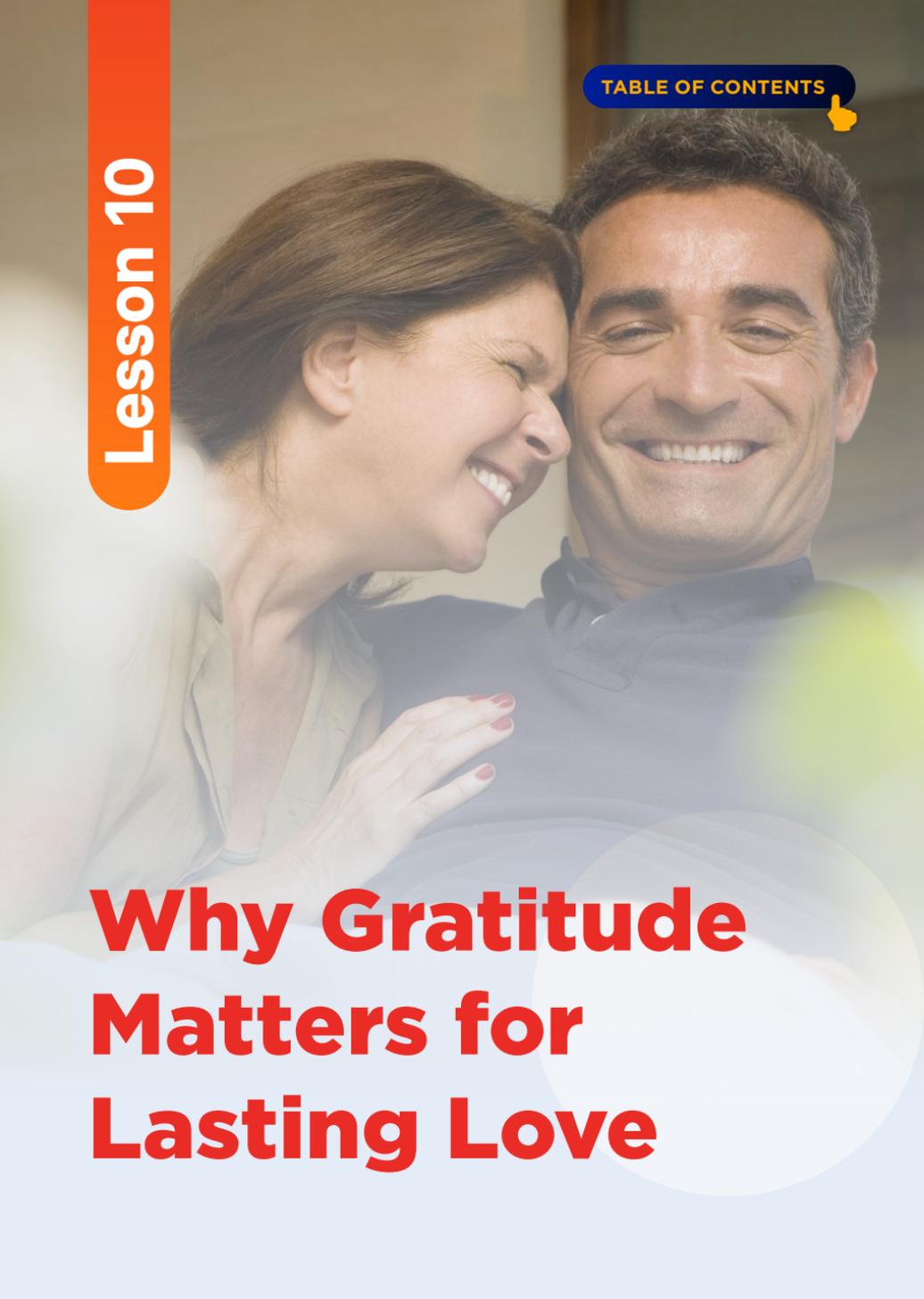
Niemiec, *Character Strengths Interventions*.

———, "VIA Character Strengths."

Peterson and Park, "Classifying and Measuring Strengths of Character."



Lesson 10

A photograph of a man and a woman smiling and embracing each other. The woman is on the left, leaning her head against the man's cheek. The man is on the right, smiling broadly. They are both wearing casual clothing. The background is slightly blurred, suggesting an indoor setting.

Why Gratitude Matters for Lasting Love

Gratitude can be described in different ways: as a feeling, a moral virtue, or even a way of life. We like to think of it as a dance, where one partner expresses gratitude and the other responds to it. This lesson explores the importance of regularly giving and receiving gratitude, a practice strongly associated with greater satisfaction in relationships.

Relationship Gym

Think of a recent time you initiated gratitude. Did you focus on the other, or the self? If you focused on the self, how could you reframe that?

How do you typically respond to gratitude?

- ▶ Deflect, reciprocate, discount
- ▶ Accept, amplify, advance

How might you modify your responses to gratitude to be a better dance partner?



Further Reading

Algoe, Fredrickson, and Gable, “The Social Functions of the Emotion of Gratitude via Expression.”

Algoe, Gable, and Maisel, “It’s the Little Things.”

Emmons, *Thanks! How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier*.

Pileggi Pawelski, “The Happy Couple.”

Lesson 11



**Responding
Rather Than
Reacting to
Your Partner**

How you respond to your partner's good news may have an even greater impact on your relationship than how you show up for them during bad times. It's easy for couples to miss this crucial component of relationships and fall into automatic reactions, which can be damaging. This lesson discusses strategies for responding well based on three areas of research: compassion, meditation, and active constructive responding.

Relationship Gym

Notice how you typically respond when your partner shares good news. Do you respond passively (not really connecting with the news), or even destructively (pointing out the downsides of the news)? Focus on responding actively and constructively instead. Take time to ask your partner questions about their experience, and show genuine interest in and support for what they have to say.



Further Reading

Gable and Haidt, "What (and Why) Is Positive Psychology?"

Gable, Gonzaga, and Strachman, "Will You Be There for Me When Things Go Right?"

Gottman, *The Relationship Cure*.

Gottman and Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*.

Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*.

Neff and Germer, "Self-Compassion and Psychological Wellbeing."

Penn Program for Mindfulness Research, <https://www.pennmedicine.org/for-patients-and-visitors/find-a-program-or-service/mindfulness/about-us/research>.

Lesson 12

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**Conclusion:
Love Is an
Action Verb**

One of the most important things that happy couples do is make frequent attempts to connect with each other. They also find healthy ways to manage stress and use it to help rather than harm their relationship. No matter what rules or tips you choose to follow to build lasting love, at the heart of it all is the Aristotelian notion that relationships flourish when partners actively support and inspire each other to become better people and to live their best lives.

Relationship Gym

Write down your most important take-aways from this course and create a workout plan for your future. What are some specific ways you will continue the work you began in this course?

Make a public commitment to becoming Aristotelian Lovers by visiting www.buildhappytogether.com, where you will find more information freely available to support you in your relational journey. Invite others to join you. Accountability often increases results.



Further Reading

Lyubomirsky, *The How of Happiness*.

McGonigal, *The Upside of Stress*.

Pileggi Pawelski and Pawelski, *Happy Together*.

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Humanities and Human Flourishing Project.
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4840 Westfields Boulevard
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